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America's Secret W

Under William Casey, the CIA is back in business w

In a string of Turkish cities and towns, agents of the Central Intelligence Agency have arranged covert support for Iranian exile groups seeking the overthrow of Ayatollah Khomeini. Two thousand miles away, in the Pakistani cities of Peshawar and Islamabad, other undercover operatives are coordinating the flow of money and matériel vital to rebel tribesmen battling Soviet invasion troops across the border in Afghanistan. The agency also supplies secret aid to friendly forces in Chad, Ethiopia, Angola and the Sudan—and has launched the massive campaign of espionage, air strikes, propaganda and other support for a now notorious "secret war" against the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Clearly, the cloaks and daggers have come out of cold storage at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va. For better or worse, the Company is back in the business of covert action—with a global scope and an intensity of resources unmatched since its heyday 20 years ago.

Under the most unlikely director of central intelligence in the agency's history—a mumbling, often maddening tax lawyer and businessman named William J. Casey (page 40)—the CIA has found its ranks expanded, redirected and re-energized for covert confrontation with hostile forces around the world. Casey also has streamlined basic analysis and reporting functions, helped swaddle the agency in a cocoon of controversial new secrecy orders and moved it forcefully into two areas of stepped-up national concern: the fight to keep tons of deadly drugs from coming into the United States each year and the battle to keep scores of critical high-tech advances from being pirated out. Casey's ability to get things done stems in large part from his close and frequent contact with the president (at least two meetings each week, plus frequent phone conversations) and with fellow members of the cabinet (Casey is the first DCI with cabinet rank).

'Mushrooms': Still, the increase in covert action has raised old questions about the wisdom, propriety and effectiveness of American intelligence activities. Critics on and off Capitol Hill say Casey shows an old cold warrior's insensitivity to the potential embarrassment and diplomatic danger that secret missions always pose—and a high-handed disregard for the role of congressional oversight in this most sensitive area. "We are like mushrooms," says California's Democratic Rep. Norman Mineta of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. "They keep us in the dark and feed us a lot of manure."

The most dramatic showdown so far came this past summer when the House Intelligence Committee voted to cut off all funds for further covert support of the anti-Sandinist contra rebels in Nicaragua—a largely symbolic act, since the Senate never concurred. The national debate will flare again in the next few weeks as Congress begins to consider the nation's 1984 intelligence budget, which is reported to have grown at a rate of 17 percent annually for the past three years, faster even than Pentagon spending, to regain the level it held before big cutbacks began back in 1973. The prospects for making any substantial cuts in the face of new Soviet aggressiveness—both the shootdown of a Korean Air Lines jetliner and Moscow's hostile rejection of the latest U.S. arms-control proposals (page 26)—"are not promising," concedes committee chairman Edward Boland of Massachusetts. Dubious, too, are prospects for a

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THE DCI AT LANGLEY: A covert clientele

NICARAGUA: Anti-Sandinista contras

events vital to our national security interests, a capability which only the United States among major powers has denied itself," it proclaimed, in pointed reference to the decimation of CIA undercover ranks under President Jimmy Carter and CIA Director Stansfield Turner (operatives were pared down to perhaps 300 from a high point of thousands in the early 1960s).

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